



Department of
Human Services
UNIVERSITY of ALASKA ANCHORAGE

Elizabeth Towers Post-Award Report

Grant Award Date: April 4th, 2023

Grant Amount: \$3,000

Organization Name: University of Alaska Anchorage, Department of Human Services

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Canadian Collaboration on Culturally Responsive Healthcare Frameworks:

Grant Awardee:	Jessica Ross MEdTL, RDH
Trip Contacts:	Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose and Professor Stacey Lovo
Trip Site Visits:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● University of Saskatchewan- Saskatoon, Saskatchewan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Professor Stacey Lovo <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Discussed Canadian Historical Trauma and Current Trauma ■ Discussed Culturally Responsive Healthcare Framework development ■ Toured University Campus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student Union ● Book Store ● Health Sciences Facilities ● Indigenous Student Center “Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre” ● School of Education ● All Nations Healing Hospital (ANHH),-Fort Qu’Appelle Saskatchewan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Professor Stacey Lovo/ Staff of ANHH ○ Toured facility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Women’s Health and Birthing Centre ■ Pasikow Muskwa Rising Bear Healing Centre ■ White Raven Healing Centre ■ Miko-Mahikan Red Wolf HIV Centre ■ Traditional Healing Spaces ● First Nations University- Regina, Saskatchewan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Professor Stacey Lovo, Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose ○ Toured facility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Library ■ Art museum ■ Classrooms ■ Ceremonial Space ● University of Regina - Regina, Saskatchewan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose ○ Toured Facility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Student Union ■ Book Store ■ School of Education ■ Nanatawihowikamik Healing Lodge and Wellness Clinic
Timeline:	06/25/2023 - 07/01/2023

Deliverables

- Evaluated methods and documented the Canadian Indigenous model of Culturally Responsive health care and Education at the University of Saskatchewan, All Nations Healing Hospital, First Nations University, and University of Regina.
- Obtained manuals and published materials on Saskatchewan’s Culturally Responsive Healthcare Framework
- Translated the practice knowledge base of the Canadian Indigenous Culturally Responsive health care model into the UAA training modules I am developing.
- Disseminated knowledge of the Canadian Indigenous model throughout my work here at UAA and work with Alaska tribal health organizations I am affiliated with.
- Disseminated my collaboration and trip to Canada during an Independent study, as evidenced by my research portfolio

- I am currently working on papers I am preparing for publication about the collaboration with Canada, where I compare Alaska and Canada models and how the collaboration has impacted my work/perspective (I will include the honor of receiving the Elizabeth Towers award to help further collaboration efforts).
- Continued collaboration and the building of new relationships with educational and healthcare facilities with similar aims have synergized my development as an Indigenous scholar.

Description of Activities

Prior to the Canadian Trip

I am an Indigenous Scholar who has been researching and developing a Culturally Responsive and Trauma-Informed (CRTI) healthcare practice training for professionals here in Alaska. Prior to earning the Elizabeth Towers Award, I met Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose and Professor Stacey Lovo online during a webinar and then later to discuss our work on developing Culturally Responsive healthcare frameworks in our regions. Although our online meetings were productive and insightful, I felt compelled to plan a site visit to Saskatchewan, Canada, in hopes of learning more about the history of the Indigenous people of that region and why Indigenous leaders and University educators felt compelled to develop a culturally responsive healthcare framework. I also strongly desired to compare the work I have been doing in Eklutna and at UAA with what they have done in Saskatchewan.

Upon receiving the Towers award, I began planning to conduct site visits where the professors work and where the Culturally Responsive healthcare framework is taught and implemented in their regions of Saskatchewan, Canada. Planning the trip was educational, as I was unfamiliar with the region's geographical layout. Although the main campus of The University of Saskatchewan is in Saskatoon, I learned that their medical school and hospital are in Regina, Saskatchewan (about a three-hour drive south of the main campus). I also learned during my planning that facilities that have integrated Culturally Responsive healthcare are scattered throughout other areas in the Canadian province (much like our situation here in Alaska, where we have many tribal healthcare facilities scattered throughout our state). Professors Sasakamoose and Lovo were excited to hear I could come down, and we planned for my trip to take place in late June of 2023.

Along with planning my travel, hotel stay, and car rental, I wanted to present my hosts with gifts from Alaska. I contacted my department at the University of Alaska Anchorage and tribal health organizations that I am affiliated with to see if they would be willing to donate some "swag" for my trip. I was able to round up reusable bags from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, cultural activity books from Southcentral Foundation and Cook Inlet Region Incorporated, reusable water tumblers from the Eklutna Community Clinic, and the

Human Services Department was able to donate chocolate bars from Chugach Chocolate company as well as small notebooks, stickers, and pens.

I also made some handmade beaded necklaces as gifts for the Elder Steering Council, who I learned were instrumental in developing the Saskatchewan Culturally Responsive Healthcare Framework. The making of these necklaces was a special process for me, as I blessed each necklace in ceremony and used beads that my mother passed down to me before she passed away.

The preparation for the trip was an extensive learning experience in and of itself.



Swag donated by the UAA Department of Human Services and Tribal Health Organizations

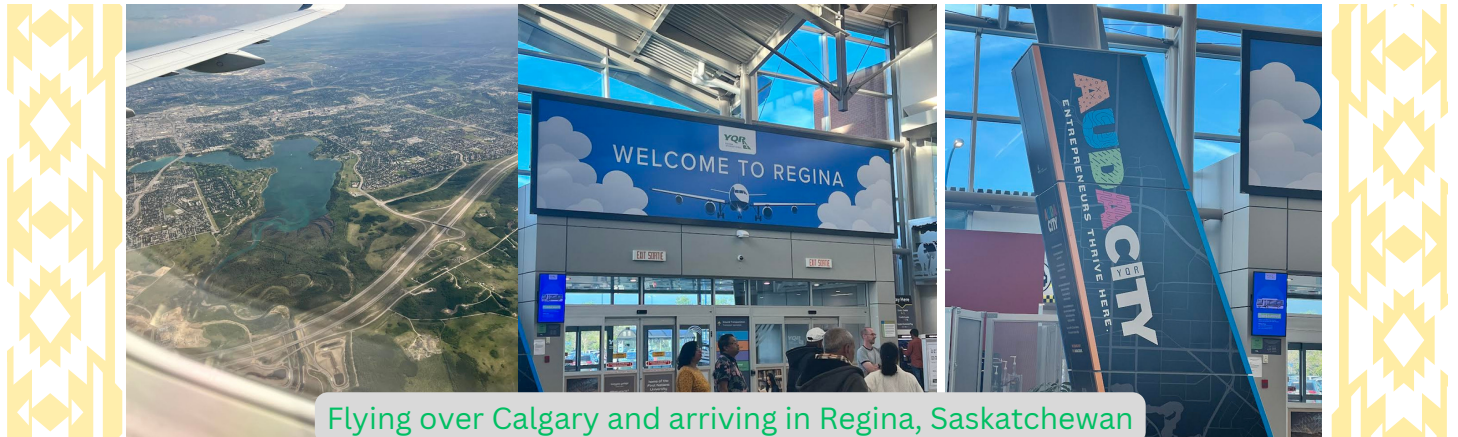
Achievements of the Canadian Trip

As I left Anchorage, Alaska, I intentionally reminded myself to stay open to this process of learning and collaboration. Despite all of my planning, I knew that things may not go the way I had intended them to. I was leaving my territory and will now be going somewhere where my ways of knowing would be obsolete. I needed to become a sponge that would take in all the new knowledge that I was about to be submerged in. Lesson number one - Be open to learning new things.

This was my first international trip for work, and the challenges of traveling “abroad” were no stranger to me as I got lost in two of the airports I landed in and had my first encounter with customs. I stumbled on my words as I tried to explain why I was visiting Canada, but once I could articulate the words, the security guard said, “That sounds cool,” and let me through. I then began to regret all the swag I had brought with me as I hauled my larger suitcase (containing all the gifts) down the massive hallways of the Calgary International Airport. Lesson number two- next time, see if you can mail swag ahead of time to hosts.

There were things I noticed immediately that seemed different than my home in Alaska. First, I noticed that instead of Starbucks, the Canadians have Tim Hortons cafes (which I actually grew to love throughout my trip). Still, I also noticed that the security at the airports is much more polite and supportive than here in the United States. I was delighted to have security ask me to “please place your carry-on item on the x-ray belt” and to “please step this way” for checks. Despite the crowds, the security team did a great job supporting the travelers through the security checkpoint process.

Upon flying into Regina, Saskatchewan, I couldn't help but notice how incredibly flat the terrain was. Surrounding Regina were thousands of miles of flat farmlands and prairies. The city itself was clean and was surprisingly very diverse, as I recognized several Filipino and East Asian families. Driving to my hotel, I noticed rows of Indian restaurants. That first evening, I enjoyed some Jollibees for dinner (a Filipino fast-food restaurant).



Flying over Calgary and arriving in Regina, Saskatchewan

The next day, I drove to Saskatoon to meet with Professor Stacey Lovo at the main campus of the University of Saskatchewan. The drive took around 3 hours across mostly flat straight roads that were interrupted twice by some rolling hills near river banks. The drive was helpful for my learning as I could see firsthand how rural the area is, as the only site to see between Regina and Saskatoon was an occasional barn and miles and miles of canola flowers. It was also very interesting to drive in a country that uses the metric system for speed and at the gas stations.

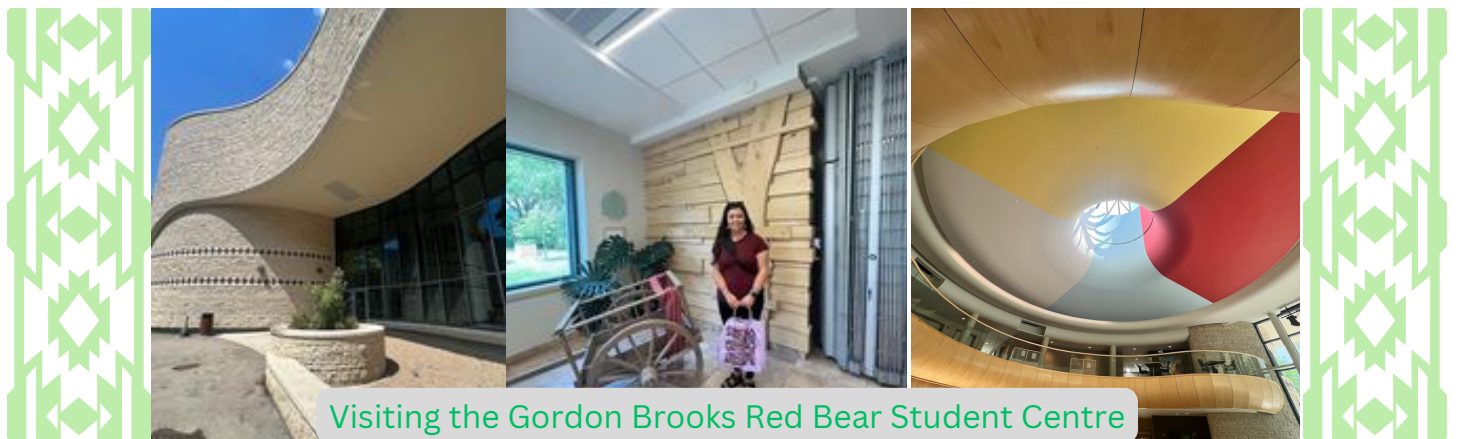
Professor Lovo was a gracious host. Upon arriving, she showed me the Student Union Hall, where I could grab a bite to eat while we discussed the history of the tribes in the area. This discussion was heavy as Professor Lovo shared with me some of the historical trauma the tribes have faced throughout colonization and the healthcare initiatives that have proved to be troublesome for Indigenous patients. One such story brought me to tears as Professor Lovo shared with me the story of Jordan, an Indigenous boy who spent his entire life of four years in a hospital institution. He did not stay in the institution because he had to but because the two government agencies that pay for medical care would not agree on who was the responsible party for the boy's medical bills. Jordan ended up dying in the hospital without ever having the opportunity to be surrounded by his culture or his family. Jordan's story inspired a movement to create legislation to improve the system so that no other child would endure what Jordan had to.

You can find information about Jordan's story here

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2722633/>

I had been curious about the healthcare systems in Canada. Coming from a country where healthcare was privatized, I wondered what it was like for Indigenous people in a land where there was a universal healthcare system in place. Professor Lovo explained that Jordan's story paints an all too real picture of the struggles that Canadian Indigenous people face when seeking health care, and that is when the two government agencies fight over who pays for what.

Professor Lovo toured me around the campus, showing me the bookstore and health sciences building where the University had displayed recent art selected to represent the various tribes in Saskatchewan. The symbols of the tribes were on display throughout the bookstore and the health sciences building's new interior. My favorite part of the tour was when Professor Lovo took me to the Gordon Brooks Red Bear Student Centre, which is a culturally relevant meeting place for Indigenous students. The building was designed by Indigenous Architect Douglas Cardinal, who was also the genius behind the design of the famous "First Nations University" in Regina, Saskatchewan. The walls of the building are curved to emulate nature and the wind, the interior entrance honors the trees that were taken down for the sake of the building, and their wood is used to ordain the interior design elements. The ceremonial space was grounded, meaning the builders took care to ensure the soil from which the foundation was dug for the building's construction was harvested and placed in containers at the bottom of the floor so that the space would be a genuine ceremonial space. The ceiling of the ceremonial space contains the medicine wheel and the star blanket, which has become a symbol of well wishes and blessings among the tribes there. This tour was my first encounter in Canada with the efforts that Saskatchewan is making to integrate Traditional wisdom and worldviews into education. It was a powerful experience.



I was able to visit the All Nations Healing Hospital (ANHH) the following day. This site visit was likely the most influential part of my trip, as the ANHH integrates traditional Indigenous healing practices with Western medical treatments. Located in Treaty Four, in a small town called Fort Qu'Appelle (approximately 45 minutes northwest of Regina) sits this small but influential facility. The hospital houses an emergency room, urgent care facilities, a dialysis center, a women's health and birthing center, and an HIV program. All of these may sound like typical programs for a healthcare facility to house, but the difference here is how ANHH delivers these care services.

Each tribal member seen at ANHH has the choice of having strictly Western medical care, strictly traditional medicine, or a combination of both. Traditional healers provide medicinal plants and prayers provided through ceremony. Tribal members are also able to utilize the on-premise sweat lodge and ceremonial spaces whenever needed. For example, someone I spoke to said they were able to have a newborn welcoming ceremony for their baby in the space. ANHH utilizes a model of care I wish to see here in Alaska, as they have not only trained their professionals on how to be culturally responsive healthcare workers, but they

have also provided ways for the revitalization of cultural practices that have led to significant healing for the Indigenous community in the area.

I share more about the impacts of my visit to the ANHH on my portfolio at

<https://alaska.digication.com/eklutna-partnership/canadian-collaboration>

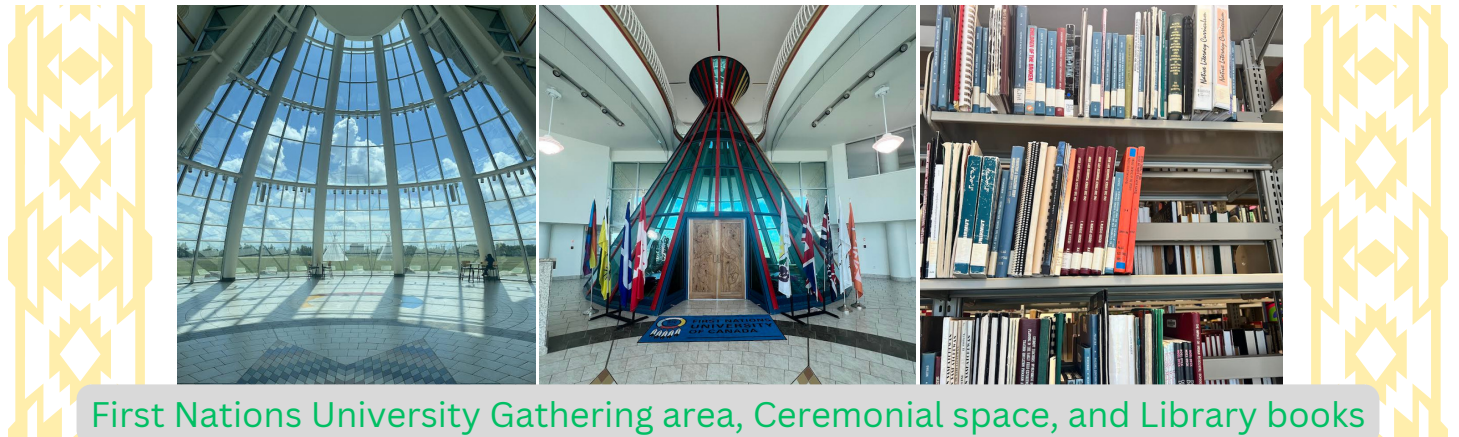


I then was able to visit the First Nations University in Regina, Saskatchewan, where I got to learn of the Indigenous Knowledge programs that the University provides its students to prepare them for various career paths, including Business and Public Administration, Communication and Arts, Education, Health, Languages, Literatures in English, Social Work, Indigenous Studies, and Indigenous Knowledge and Science. The facility is impressive as the architect Douglas Cardinal instilled Indigenous values into every aspect of the design of the building.



The building draws your attention as you draw closer, the shape so distinct from the surrounding architecture. The Large Teepees that adorn the front of the building reflect in the glass, giving the impression that you are in the midst of a village. To me, it gave me the impression that I am not alone and that my tribe is always with me. The art throughout the building conveyed stories very similar to my own. The struggles with historical and direct trauma of being the descendants of survivors who were victims of genocide and assimilation acts like residential schools. The art communicated anger, confusion, resilience, and pride. The library of the University was one of the most impressive collections I have come across, as the entire collection was made up of historical accounts of the local tribes or books

written by Indigenous historians and scholars. To be in a room with so much Indigenous knowledge was overwhelmingly inspirational. I held back tears as I walked through the aisles, running my fingers over the backs to titles in languages that were not my own yet so familiar to me.



First Nations University Gathering area, Ceremonial space, and Library books

The large gathering center was impressive as its center laid a blanket star. The poles surrounding the gathering space were adorned with local indigenous language. Directly behind the gathering space was a ceremonial room, where artifacts for special occasions were housed, and prayers and songs could be offered. I entered this space not as a curious scholar but as an Indigenous woman. I felt the need to hold a ceremony to thank the ancestors of these lands for allowing me to come and learn from them. I prayed and sat in silence, feeling a wave of peace rush over me, almost as if the ancestors were in approval of my presence.

I then had a chance to meet up with Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose, who works as a consultant for the University of Saskatchewan's Health Department and who is the founder of the Nanatawihowikamik Healing Lodge and Wellness Clinic at the University of Regina. Dr. Sasakamoose toured me around the School of Education and the Healing Lodge within it. She shared with me her vision for creating such a space on campus for her students, who are learning to become behavioral health specialists. The building of a traditional healing lodge in a University building was challenging, as Dr. Sasakamoose described how an Elder or Knowledge keeper approved every step of the building process. The space not only provides a safe haven for people seeking healing on campus, but it has also incorporated traditional symbols throughout to promote wellbeing. The Lodge is considered sacred, so to be granted permission to enter was quite an honor.



The Nanatawihowikamik Healing Lodge and Wellness Clinic

Being able to see firsthand the efforts that educational and healthcare facilities are making to become more culturally responsive was incredibly impactful. I learned so much about the history of Saskatchewan, the tribes that have resided there for time immemorial, the traumatic events that have taken place there, and the innovative ways Canadians are trying to establish reconciliation.

I was also able to establish a stronger relationship with Dr. JoLee Sasakamoose and Professor Lovo. Being able to hear their stories and witness the incredible work they do in Saskatchewan helped me to define my own ideas and hopes for the outcomes of my work here at UAA. Dr. JoLee was also delighted to meet face to face, and we have since discussed future plans for more collaboration. I followed up with Professor Lovo recently, and she had this to say about my visit:

"It was phenomenal to meet in person to begin to develop a relationship. We have a very common interest in Culturally Responsive care, as colonization and oppression of Indigenous Peoples is an international concern. I think it is very important to have international collaborators who can be mutually supportive along the journey."

I wholeheartedly agree with Professor Lovo, and this trip helped to solidify a relationship that can lead to effective and lasting changes in our Indigenous healthcare facilities. Not only did this trip inspire me as a scholar, but it also provided much-needed affirmations of Indigenous culture that I needed for myself as I continued on my journey of embracing my Indigenous identity. Although there were moments during this trip where I felt overwhelmed by the information I was exposed to, there were also many more moments where I was reminded how important my work is. On the trip back up to Alaska, I had a chance to explore downtown Calgary and happened to come across the memorial for the children who passed away at residential/boarding schools in Canada. I stood at the fence, staring at all the shoes that lined the steps of the capital building, and sobbed. So many shoes. So many lost children. A history that for so long has not been acknowledged and recognized, yet it explains why there is so much pain among America's Indigenous groups. The message that

this last site gave me rang loud and clear. Keep going. Keep learning. Keep finding ways to help.



Thousands of shoes line the steps of Alberta Calgary's federal building representing the lost children who perished while attending residential schools

More information about the history of residential schools throughout Canada (and the United States) can be found at <https://nctr.ca/education/teaching-resources/residential-school-history/#:~:text=For%20a%20period%20of%20more,Many%20never%20returned.>

Future Plans for Collaboration with Canada

Since my face-to-face visit with Professors Sasakamoose and Lovo and my visit to ANHH, I have made connections with the Indigenous Health Program's dean's office at the University of Saskatchewan, as well as with the All Nation's Healing Hospitals administrative team. Professor Sasakamoose, Lovo, and I continue to collaborate online and have plans for me to meet the Saskatchewan Elder Steering Council over Zoom in October 2023. We aim to set up an online meeting session for the Dena'ina Elder Steering Council I am establishing in Eklutna to meet with the Saskatchewan Elder Steering Council in November or December of 2023. Eventually, we would like to find funding to have the two Elder Steering Councils meet face-to-face to collaborate further on what Culturally Responsive healthcare should look like.

As I continue to build relationships and projects with teams in Canada, my aim is to return to Saskatchewan to meet with The Elder Steering Council, the Dean of Indigenous Health, and the traditional healers from the All Nations Healing Hospital. This continued collaboration will help shape future efforts toward establishing strong culturally relevant materials and beliefs in the CRTI I am developing here in Alaska.

All of this was possible because the Elizabeth Towers Award committee took a chance and selected me to receive this award. Chin'an gheli shu hqeldihch' (thank you very much for

this education).